

## For Board, Council Candidates, Pledge of Unity on Student Issues

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**F**ive Democratic candidates for the Board of Education and County Council banded together this week, pledging better "cooperation and collaboration" between the two entities if they are successful in the November election.

The all-female signatories to the compact are County Council member **Marilyn Praisner** (Eastern County), who is seeking a fifth term; at-large council candidate **Duchy Trachtenberg**; school board member **Valerie Ervin**, who is seeking Silver Spring's District 5 County Council seat; Board of Education member **Nancy Navarro** (Northeastern County), who is seeking reelection; and school board candidate **Judy Docca**, who is running in Gaithersburg District 1.

The group promises regular meetings, shared legislative

agendas in Annapolis and a commitment to issues such as quality child care, programs for at-risk children, better resources for students whose first language is not English and earlier identification of students with learning disabilities.

Even as they signed the document, the group acknowledged its diverse leadership styles and said "we are not committing to agree on everything."

The compact is not a joint endorsement or a slate, such as the "End Gridlock" team of County Council candidates that County Executive **Douglas M. Duncan** (D) backed in 2002.

"It is a pledge to the voters of this county and to its children that five candidates for public office want greater collaboration for better governance," according to the document.

In fact, the group invites all candidates for school board and council — including men — to sign, Trachtenberg said.

### Rocking the Vote For County Council

**Hans Riemer**, a 33-year-old political director for Rock the Vote, is running for a Montgomery County Council seat against a political heavyweight who has the backing of the county teachers union.

But Riemer has his own support, albeit not from a group that typically influences county politics. This week, Riemer announced he has received an endorsement from a national political action committee called 21st Century Democrats that supports progressive and populist candidates.

"I think it's an honor to have the recognition," said Riemer, an East Silver Spring resident. "I think the way social change is made is through incredible risks taken by real leaders, and I hope to offer that kind of vision for Montgomery County."

Riemer faces a formidable challenger in Ervin, who was also an aide to council President **George L. Leventhal** (D-At Large). The two are seeking to replace Tom Perez as the District 5 representative on the council. Perez is running for state attorney general.

Ervin's decision last week to seek a seat on the council forced other candidates to alter their plans. Takoma Park City Council member **Joy Austin-Lane** of Ward 1 dropped out of the race, and Ta-

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Montgomery Park City Council member **Marc Elrich** of Ward 5 decided to run for an at-large seat.

Riemer said he does not intend to back out of the race. "I believe that any race is winnable," he said.

### Once Again, Ficker Throws His Hat in the Ring

**Robin Ficker**, perennial candi-

date and anti-tax advocate, announced late last week that he has submitted about 7,000 signatures to the Montgomery County Board of Elections to run as an independent for county executive.

Ficker said that was more than enough to get his name on the ballot for the Nov. 7 general election. State law requires that an independent candidate collect signatures from 1 percent of registered

voters. In Ficker's case, that would be about 5,500 signatures.

"By some miracle if we don't have enough, they can notify us and we'll get more," he said.

The Board of Elections has 20 days to verify the signatures.

Ficker, a 62-year-old lawyer and Boyds resident, had originally planned to run in the county executive race as a Republican. But he left the party in April after a state

party official suggested that he was not a viable candidate.

The Democratic candidates for county executive are former council member **Isiah Leggett**, council member **Steven A. Silverman** (D-At Large) and retired grocery store clerk **Robert Fustero**. The Republican candidate is former State Department employee **Charles R. Floyd**.

Ficker said he collected most of the signatures by standing in front of shopping centers.

"I think it's good voter contact, which is something I don't see the other guys are doing," he said. "They're just orchestrated by consultants."

Ficker's political career includes a stint as a state delegate and several unsuccessful bids for elected office, such as state senator and Montgomery school board member. Since 1974, he has successfully placed 20 initiatives on the ballot. Most called for lower taxes or term limits. Voters have approved three of his initiatives.

Ficker is collecting signatures to place another question on the ballot, one that would lower the county's income tax or force the county to reduce its property tax revenue.

### A Benefit to Companies That Have Telecommuters

In this week of gloomy, wet weather, there was some bright news for employers who encourage their employees to work from home.

The County Council on Tuesday endorsed a new tax credit for companies that buy personal computers for telecommuters. The credit will cover up to 50 percent of the cost of each computer, up to \$2,000 a year. The company must show that the computers are being used for work at least 1.5 days a week or 78 days a year.

The measure, sponsored by Praiser and District 1 council member **Howard A. Denis** (R-Potomac-Bethesda), is meant to ease traffic congestion by promoting telecommuting.